

An Investigation of Cultural Capital and Musical Identity in Music Education  
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Lamont (2002) suggests that musical identity is shaped by four contextual systems that make up the environment in which they live. *Microsystems* represent access to music at home, school, church, or other neighborhood locations. *Mesosystems* represent the spaces individuals negotiate among their musical experiences in these different environments. Individual musical identities are also influenced by *exosystems* of school district, state, or national policies that impact access to music instruction and participation, and musical values portrayed in the media. Finally, *macrosystems* shape musical identities by communicating broader cultural values, such as acceptable roles for musicians in a given society. These various systems work together to shape the musical environments that individual children experience.

Cultural capital theory suggests that higher-SES families implicitly provide their children with a wealth of knowledge that facilitates pursuit of education and career (Bates, 2012; Bourdieu, 1977; Jæger, 2009). Researchers identify a strong relationship between access to cultural capital, including opportunities to participate in school, church, and private music activities, and access to a college education (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Students without such access may draw on non-dominant forms of familial, social, and cultural capital to achieve educational success (Yosso, 2005).

In this narrative study, we compare our life experiences from childhood through high school, exploring ways our access to cultural capital influenced our musical identities. Guiding questions for the study included: What opportunities and challenges contributed to our education? How did access to cultural capital shape our musical identities and persistence in music? What are the implications for music education? We conducted 18 hours of interviews, analyzing them for key turning points in our development as musicians and educators (Glesne, 1999). We wrote separate narratives, then compared the narratives, examining them in light of research on musical identity and theories of cultural capital.

Marg grew up in a middle class neighborhood, the daughter of a college professor. She chose violin at fourth-grade instrument try-outs. Her parents rented an instrument, bought the required books, and paid for the summer beginners program. When her teacher suggested private lessons and a new violin, her parents obliged. She and her friends participated in their school and area youth orchestras and attended summer music camps. Marg's parents helped her research colleges and plan campus visits; her private teacher prepared her for auditions. She chose a small college, where she could continue to develop her musical identity.

Joyce lived in an older urban neighborhood in a large southern city, with her grandmother, grandfather, and father. She dreamed of learning to play like the church pianist. Recognizing her desire, her aunt bought a little keyboard. She couldn't always pay, but the teacher kept teaching. Joyce's fourth-grade teacher noticed her interest in music and helped her aunt with an application for a performing arts magnet school. Joyce chose to play clarinet in the band because her cousin owned one. Her school experiences were mostly nurturing and positive, but when family members heard her practicing clarinet, they yelled "White girl! Take that outside." Joyce's teachers soon recommended advanced classes. Joyce loved the challenge, but noticed that she saw few African-American students in those classes and band. Her teachers suggested she apply to college, and helped with the overwhelming paperwork; her band teacher helped her create an audition tape. When she was accepted into her first-choice college, she was

both excited and scared, realizing she didn't know how she would pay for school or where she would live. Her freshman year overflowed with learning how college worked. Joyce completed bachelor's and master's degrees, and taught band in a large urban high school.

Both participants developed strong musical identities as successful members of school ensembles, but comparison of their experiences highlights the role differential access to cultural capital played in shaping their identities. Marg took for granted the privileged access her family environment provided to the cultural capital that developed her musical identity and interests (Jæger, 2009); Joyce, unaware of exactly what she was doing, found other paths to acquire access to resources that shaped her musical identity. When her family offered little help, peers and teachers provided community cultural wealth in the form of role models and guidance (Yosso, 2005). Joyce encountered two types of isolation: to be accepted at home, she had to suppress part of herself. At school, although accepted by teachers and peers, she found herself racially isolated in advanced classes, unable to express aspects of her home culture at school. Joyce taught herself to negotiate both environments, first as a cultural mainstreamer, later as a straddler (Carter, 2006).

We recommend that music teacher educators help preservice and inservice teachers become more aware of the variety of environments that may shape their students' musical identities, particularly *cultural straddlers* (Carter, 2006) like Joyce, who learn to function well in school, but may need to draw on additional resources, such as forms of community cultural wealth, to move easily between home and school environments. Further research can continue to explore the complex relationships among SES and race/ethnicity in shaping students' musical identities and access to musical opportunities.

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